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Bitov and Nosenko

Oleg Bitov, a former Soviet editor who defected to Britain last year, has turned up in Moscow with a wild tale about being drugged and kidnapped by the British secret service.

Since we're dealing here with realities that resemble spy fiction, don't take us too seriously. But we couldn't help thinking of another "defector" of some years back, by the name of Yuri Nosenko.

Mr. Nosenko, a KGB officer, flew the coop shortly after the assassination in November 1963 of President Kennedy. He had an interesting story to tell U.S. interrogators. It seems—marvelous coincidence—that he had supervised the KGB file on Lee Harvey Oswald. And he thus knew for a fact that the Soviets had no role in the assassination, however suspicious Oswald's past liaisons with the Soviets

and Cubans might have looked. The Nosenko story was the subject of extensive debate within the CIA, with the pro-Nosenko faction finally triumphing.

Mr. Bitov, it turns out, also had special knowledge. His magazine, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, had published the official Soviet line on the 1981 attempt on the pope. The official line was that the Soviets had nothing to do with it, contrary to suspicions in the West deriving from an almost-certain involvement of the Bulgarian secret police. During his sojourn in the West, Mr. Bitov made a specialty of describing the exhaustive research that went into the preparation of the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* article.

As we say, this all sounds like spy fiction. But spy fiction just happens to be one of our special weaknesses.